

Nairobi interviews

Interview: Feirus Abdullahi

Feirus Abdullahi is a young female entrepreneur based in Nairobi Kenya, she owns a popular Korean beauty store called Glow Secrets. Glow Secrets' large online presence and accessibility for people to gain affordable Korean skin care has allowed the business to quickly expand, with two stores in Nairobi, Feirus is looking to open her third store later this year in Mombasa.

Please tell me about yourself and your work?

My name is Feirus, I am an entrepreneur, I own a skin care store called Glow Secrets and I deal with skin care.

How have you adapted to COVID-19 in Kenya?

Honestly COVID-19 worked in our favour, people are more aware of their self-care, more people are at home and have more time to spend on themselves and it has been good for the skin care business as people were more interested in doing skincare.

How has COVID-19 and the restrictions in Kenya affected you and your work?

In the beginning due to the curfews we had to reduce our work hours, after that we actually closed down our stores for like a month so it really affected us at the beginning, but this helped us also to have a stronger online presence as more people were at home and using their phones.

Has the economic impact of the pandemic changed the way you look after other people?

Definitely, of course because of COVID-19 you just don't know how the future will be, I had to look after my finances more and be stricter because you don't know what is ahead. And family wise we stopped doing what we used to do together, now you can't go out and do activities anymore but at the same time you see more of your family. Instead as a family we have started baking and cooking more as we have been at home.

Has the social impact of the pandemic changed the way you look after other people?

I don't see my friends anymore, there are no more gatherings, my friend and I normally meet up once a week. I haven't seen her in months so our connection as friends and our bond has actually faded.

What does your culture tell you about wellbeing?

In my culture and growing up in a Somali community and growing up where I grew up nobody really cares about that, they really don't care about wellbeing, but as I grew up I understood that it is something we should have been taught when we were kids and now we are figuring out that even with so much to do you still have to take care of yourself mentally. Where we come from and where we were raised no one had time for that.

What is your understanding now of wellbeing?

My understanding of wellbeing is making sure that my mind is at peace and I'm taking care of myself and investing in myself. By investing it's not always about material things but

doing something in terms of my craft and work, I treat myself well and show myself love before anyone else, I take care of myself mentally, physically this is important to me.

What wellbeing practices have you taken during this period? (For example: practises such as physical exercise, connecting with the family/friends)

Yes I always make time, so things I do for my well being is going shopping, once in a while I go for trips, for example recently when we were allowed I went to Mombasa to calm my mind so I don't go crazy as work is a lot for me. I also go for massages every month, I go to the salon every week and every Sunday is me time, it is something I plan for myself.

Has this selfcare/wellbeing practices you conducted increased or decreased during the pandemic?

It has decreased during the pandemic as many things have been closed or the work hours of the places I used to go to have reduced, so it has impacted how often I go to them.

You said that this is very important for your wellbeing, so how has this form of wellbeing practice helped you during this period? Has it been a type of escape?

To keep my sanity, that's why.

Do you see your beauty routine/self-care as part of your wellbeing practises? And if so, has this increased due to COVID-19?

Yes, definitely because it is part of showing love to yourself and I have seen a major increase in this, both in terms of my clients and myself. During the pandemic I don't know what happened but people are so invested in themselves and I believe people for the first time had time to actually look in the mirror and see themselves. And the more time you have the more energy you can put into other things that you didn't think were as important before.

Have these practises enhanced your awareness/mindfulness of yourself or have they provided you a space to escape? Has it enhanced your connection with yourself?

I really think it has and it is more due to the fact that there is just more time now and there is more self-awareness because of that.

You stated earlier that you have started baking and making cakes, do you do this at home? And do you do it with family members? Would you say that this is a new form of tradition you have built during this time?

Yes, I have started baking and cooking with my family, its something I never used to do before because I just didn't have the time, but now we were at home and we had nothing to do so you had to figure out what to do in order to fill the time but it's something that has become a form of tradition and I'm hoping to continue with my family in the future.

Apart from the wellbeing practices you conduct yourself, are there spaces around your area or in Nairobi which help your wellbeing?

Yes, I go to the national park and drive around the whole day. It is really an escape. You just go to the park and drive to get away from everything. And going to the national park has increased for Kenyans now because we were stuck in Nairobi, the movement out of the city was restricted so the national park has really been a sense of escape for us.

As someone from Nairobi why do you think people use outdoor parks or national parks to escape?

Because Nairobi is so fast, it's non-stop hustling and non-stop working and trying to survive, life is fast here and people are looking for money so it becomes too much and sometimes you need an escape. For me I work everyday, from Monday to Sunday, I have no breaks and I don't take my work as work because I love it but there are points when I'm like no I need a break, this is too much for me for you really need those moments and especially during these times we are in.

Interview: Simon Thou

Simon Thuo is an undergraduate student at the Cooperative University in Nairobi studying Business and Commerce. However, because of the pandemic, Simon's studies are temporarily on hold as all National universities and schools are closed in Kenya. Since the start of the pandemic Simon has been working in King's Garden grocery store helping Karen locals with their fruits and vegetables.

Please tell me about yourself and your work?

I work in a grocery store in Karen, Nairobi called Kings Garden

How have you adapted to COVID-19 in Kenya?

During this Corona times it is very tough, people need to be socially distanced and this work requires some form of contact with people and because of the social distancing it has been challenging.

We have just been following the rules that are in place in Kenya, such as social distancing and wearing a mask in public, washing your hands, sanitising, we have put all these measures in place in our store.

How has COVID-19 and the restrictions in Kenya affected you and your work? Where there was first a curfew for 6pm and now it has changed to 9pm.

When it was 6pm we had to change our work hours in order to reach home on time and avoid trouble with the police and it has also obviously impacted our wages.

And what about your home life?

Home life, it is also challenging, when you come back home from work in order to protect the people at your home you have to make sure you sanitise everything, make sure you don't touch anything before you do that and you can't even hug your loved ones unless you take those steps.

Has anyone from your family returned to your home county due to COVID-19 and people losing their jobs?

My family is in Kitale, recently my mum came to Nairobi when they allowed movement between counties to see us. Before the closing of counties, we used to host family meetings regularly and discuss family issues because our parents are based in Kitale, but we have not seen them for 5 months until they opened the counties.

Has the economic impact of the pandemic changed the way you look after other people?

I don't have family or children that I take care of but financially you have to buy a mask now as it's the rule to wear in public so it has brought another expense into my life.

Has the social impact of the pandemic changed the way you look after other people?

Every Sunday I used to go skating but because of this Corona the place I used to go to is closed and no longer safe and for 5-6 months I haven't done skating, so my life has been going to work and in my off day I just sleep. And now I'm sure that my skating skills are very low.

And do you think that roller-skating adds on to your wellbeing?

Yes, it is my hobby, when I'm free that was the best thing I used to do and now I don't have access to it I don't feel how I used to feel. I have the urge to go out and roller-skate but I can't now.

But have you gone back to roller-skating since the restrictions have been eased?

No because I also care for myself so I'm not ready to go back there, apart from the restrictions the government uses I also care for myself.

What do you do culturally in Kenya that helps with your wellbeing? For example, church services or family gathering?

Yes, we have family gatherings every December and we also try to get together often during the year and this has been our tradition. Like I said we were supposed to have a family meeting before Corona and my parents have been in their home county unable to travel, until now we have not done it, so we had to postpone and recently things have opened up but it already took a long time.

What wellbeing practices have you taken during this period? (For example: practises such as physical exercise, connecting with the family/friends)

To be sincere I have not, skating is the only thing I enjoyed doing and when I'm free it was the only thing I enjoyed doing. And I stopped exercising, we stopped working at 6.30pm and I reached home at 8.30pm so I don't really have time. I used to use skating as a form of exercise. So all I have been doing is my job and going to sleep, maybe a movie at night before I sleep.

Is there something else you used to do before corona that you can no longer do? You mentioned skating to be but is there something else?

I didn't mention that I am a student at the Cooperative University here in Karen studying Business and Commerce but because schools are closed here I started this work, I didn't work before Corona started. I was just a student so this work is something new to me.

As you said your work here in Kings Garden is something new, so does that help you with your wellbeing as it gives you a chance to meet/interact with people?

I really like having fun with customers here and interacting with them and it allows you to be out of this corona mood so I enjoy this part of my work as before I was just in school, it has really helped because I couldn't just be sitting at home during this period.

Apart from the wellbeing practises you conduct yourself, are there spaces around your area or in Nairobi which help your wellbeing?

Yes, I go to Two Rivers when I'm off, it's a place I go to just to ease myself and just for pleasure and it is the only opportunity I have with my friends, so I look forward to it and I see it as a part of my wellbeing.

What has this period taught you? What have you gained from this time?

Yes, it has taught me that you should treasure the time you have with people, now I have been without my family for 5 months so it has impacted me a lot and the things I used to do like roller-skating and going to school have been taken away. So it has allowed me to appreciate everything in life and it's something I can take from this period.

Interview: Ali Malembi

Ali Malembi holds a bachelor's degree in Accounting and has military training. Originally from Mombasa Kenya, Ali now lives in Nairobi working as a Police Officer for the National government of Kenya, dealing with various security matters as a security watchman for government officials.

Please tell me about yourself and your work?

I'm Ali Malembi from Kenya and I work as a Police officer, generally I deal with security matters.

How have you adapted to COVID-19 in Kenya?

It has been very difficult to adapt to COVID-19 in general but so far we are doing well, we are proceeding well and following the Ministry of Health guidelines, as a country we are doing good. Personally it has affected me financially and even though I am struggling here and there to make my living.

How has COVID-19 and the restrictions in Kenya affected you and your work?

This has affected most Kenyans because before COVID-19 people used to work during night hours but now only some departments work during night hours like the police department or hospitals, the remaining departments work less hours now which has an impact on the gross domestic product of the country. For myself it has also affected me, what I used to get has decreased, the government had to make some cuts so my wages have been impacted.

As a Police officer, how have the restrictions impacted you?

Even though I am police, there are some places I can not go to during night hours when I'm not on duty so it is also affecting me.

Has the economic impact of the pandemic changed the way you look after other people?

The monthly salaries have been reduced and the commodity prices have not changed. This has affected the family consumption, and it is very difficult to balance your family consumption daily with low wages and salary. We have learned a lot this year on how to budget ourselves on the few amounts of money we get.

Has the social impact of the pandemic changed the way you look after other people?

Now we don't interact with people so much like the way we used to interact before COVID-19 due to this pandemic we have to keep distances, we don't gather together, you

have to be alone most of the time and this change is not good for Kenyans, we are used to being together as a family and community.

What does your culture tell you about wellbeing?

Nothing really, and on my own I am struggling with this as a person, it is something I am learning to prioritise.

Have you taken part in any cultural practises or traditions during this Pandemic?

No, group interactions have been limited so no cultural practises could happen, and this has had an impact on my social wellbeing.

How has your family been impacted?

My family is in Mombasa, and in Mombasa they are doing better than Nairobi because the number of infections are less and so restrictions were not very tight compared to places where infections were high.

Have you as a family bonded more during this time as the kids were at home?

No, there has been less bonding because I could not travel back to Mombasa, all the roads were closed, so I have been alone in Nairobi. There were no interactions also in Mombasa because all the beaches were closed.

How has it impacted you not being able to travel back home?

It affects you psychologically because you are always lonely and you want to interact with your family and this is a huge problem.

What wellbeing practices have you taken during this period? (For example: practises such as physical exercise, connecting with the family/friends)/

With my job we take part in practices and drills to keep our bodies fit, I also make sure that I connect with my family but this has decreased because of the restriction here in Kenya.

Have you found yourself increasing your wellbeing practices due to COVID-19? If so, can you provide an example?

Yes, I have increased the amount of exercise I do and this is because I am trying to keep my body fit in order to fight COVID-19. If your body is fit then the disease might not affect you, so I've increased my activity for health reasons.

Have these practices enhanced your awareness/mindfulness of yourself or have they provided you a space to escape?

Yes it has helped me a lot, before COVID-19 I used to be sick now and then, I used to visit the hospital every month, but since the start of the pandemic and increasing my exercises such as jogging, weights or playing football both at work and in my personal life it has helped me. Before the pandemic we used to relax so much, our bodies were not physically fit but now there are not so many frequent visits to the hospital. This has also increased throughout Kenya which is a benefit that we can take from the pandemic.

Do you feel like when you exercise that it is a form of escape, a moment for you to breath and not think about the reality we are living in?

Yes, it relieves you from stress when you're practising, it refreshes the mind and makes you feel more comfortable.

Apart from wellbeing practises you conduct yourself, are there spaces around your area or in Nairobi which help your wellbeing?

Yes, there are so many public spaces such as Uhuru Park, Uhuru Garden, all the museums in Kenya and national parks, but since Corona started these spaces have been restricted because the government doesn't want these spaces to be congested. So nowadays most people just relax at home, if you have a garden or small space then you can exercise there.